

Testimony in Front of the Finance, Revenue & Bonding Committee

SB 21, SB 28, SB 29

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Good afternoon Senator Fonfara, Representative Scanlon and all the members of the Finance, Revenue and Bonding Committee. My name is John O'Connor. I teach in the sociology department at Central Connecticut State University. I am a member of CSU-AAUP, and my union is a proud member of the Recovery for All coalition. I am testifying in strong support of SB 21, SB 28, and SB 29.

As all the members of this committee know, Connecticut is one of the wealthiest states in our nation, but we are riddled with crippling inequality. We are a state that promises a lot, but in important ways we deliver too little. Recently, our state has suffered through a number of crises -- the COVID pandemic, an economic contraction, and sustained racial injustice that have all damaged our communities and they have pushed the lives of working families into disarray. As a nation and as a state, we have a choice in front of us regarding how we will respond to this accumulation of crises. We will either extend our hand to our neighbors or we will turn our backs on them.

At CCSU, where I work, I have seen both the inequality that defines our state and the impact of these crises on the students who will lead Connecticut tomorrow. Since the CSCU system was created in 2011, my system has been plagued by persistent budget deficits. These deficits have compromised the education my students receive, having their programs hallowed out and the availability of classes compromised.

Budgetary problems have serious implications. Our Community Colleges and State Universities serve those populations that often have been marginalized and forgotten. It is those students, often dismissed because of their race, class, age, immigration status, sexuality, or first-generation designation, that get degrees in the CSCU system.

At Central, we have far too many students that are housing and food insecure who are juggling their course obligations with a struggle to shelter and feed themselves. With the onset of the COVID crisis, our Community Colleges and State Universities have seen the exodus of far too many students. We need to be clear – these are not students who did not possess the talent, the skills, or the drive to succeed, they simply did not have the money to pay. COVID has increased the ranks of Connecticut’s Higher Ed “disappeared,” those that enrolled one semester and gone the next.

CSU-AAUP and the Recovery for All Coalition believe that SB 21 and SB 28 will lead to revenue gain, which will lessen our state’s residents economic pain. This revenue will help steer our educational institutions in a just and equitable direction. They will empower our students to reach their full potential and contribute to the economic and cultural development of our shared communities.

SB 29 will improve the lives of those that are struggling. While I would much rather see a cradle to the grave welfare system that protects the vulnerable and empowers families. SB 29, in expanding the earned income tax credit, would help our neighbors who are struggling.

As the recent study by the Department of Revenue makes clear, we have a major problem with tax fairness in our state. Both CSU-AAUP and Recovery for All encourage this committee to pass these three bills because they would help low-wage earners who have lost 26% of their earnings to taxes.

I hope this committee will move these bills forward.

Thank you for your time.